

FACT SHEET: Floods and Flash Floods

Mitigation pays. It includes any activities that prevent an emergency, reduce the chance of an emergency happening, or lessen the damaging effects of unavoidable emergencies. Investing in mitigation steps now such as constructing barriers such as levees and purchasing flood insurance will help reduce the amount of structural damage to your home and financial loss from building and crop damage should a flood or flash flood occur.

BEFORE a Flood Occurs

Find out if you live in a flood-prone area from your local emergency management office or Community Planning and Development office.

Ask whether your property is above or below the flood stage water level and learn about the history of flooding for your region.

Learn flood-warning signs and your community alert signals.

Request information on preparing for floods and flash floods.

If you live in a frequently flooded area, stockpile emergency building materials. These include plywood, plastic sheeting, lumber nails, hammer and saw, pry bar, shovels, and sandbags.

Have check valves installed in building sewer traps to prevent floodwater from backing up in sewer drains. As a last resort, use large corks or stoppers to plug showers, tubs, or basins.

Plan and practice an evacuation route.

Contact the local emergency management office or local American Red Cross chapter for a copy of the community flood evacuation plan.

This plan should include information on the safest routes to shelters. Individuals living in flash flood areas should have several alternative routes.

Have disaster supplies on hand:

- Flashlights and extra batteries
- Portable, battery-operated radio and extra batteries
- First aid kit and manual
- Emergency food and water
- Non-electric can opener
- Essential medicines
- Cash and credit cards
- Sturdy shoes

Develop an emergency communication plan.

- In case family members are separated from one another during floods or flashfloods (a real possibility during the day when adults are at work and children are at school), have a plan for getting back together.

- Ask an out-of-state relative or friend to serve as the "family contact." After a disaster, it's often easier to call long distance. Make sure everyone in the family knows the name, address, and phone number of the contact person.
- Make sure that all family members know how to respond after a flood or flash flood.
- Teach all family members how and when to turn off gas, electricity, and water.
- Teach children how and when to call 9-1-1, police, fire department, and which radio station to tune to for emergency information.
- Learn about the National Flood Insurance Program. Ask your insurance agent about flood insurance. Homeowner policies do not cover flood damage.

DURING A FLOOD WATCH

- Listen to a battery-operated radio for the latest storm information.
- Fill bathtubs, sinks, and jugs with clean water in case water becomes contaminated.
- Bring outdoor belongings, such as patio furniture, indoors.
- Move valuable household possessions to the upper floors or to safe ground if time permits.
- If you are instructed to do so by local authorities, turn off all utilities at the main switch and close the main gas valve.
- Be prepared to evacuate.

DURING A FLOOD

If Indoors:

- Turn on battery-operated radio or television to get the latest emergency information.
- Get your pre-assembled emergency supplies.
- If told to leave, do so immediately.

If Outdoors:

- Climb to high ground and stay there.
- Avoid walking through any floodwaters. If it is moving swiftly, even water 6 inches deep can sweep you off your feet.

If In A Car:

- If you come to a flooded area, turn around and go another way.
- If your car stalls, abandon it immediately and climb to higher ground. Many deaths have resulted from attempts to move stalled vehicles.

DURING AN EVACUATION

- If advised to evacuate, do so immediately.
- Evacuation is much simpler and safer before floodwaters become too deep for ordinary vehicles to drive through.
- Listen to a battery-operated radio for evacuation instructions.
- Follow recommended evacuation routes--shortcuts may be blocked.
- Leave early enough to avoid being marooned by flooded roads.

AFTER

- Flood dangers do not end when the water begins to recede. Listen to a radio or television and don't return home until authorities indicate it is safe to do so.
- Remember to help your neighbors who may require special assistance--infants, elderly people, and people with disabilities.
- Inspect foundations for cracks or other damage.
- Stay out of buildings if flood water remains around the building.
- When entering buildings, use extreme caution.
- Wear sturdy shoes and use battery-powered lanterns or flashlights when examining buildings.
- Examine walls, floors, doors, and windows to make sure that the building is not in danger of collapsing.
- Watch out for animals, especially poisonous snakes, that may have come into your home with the floodwaters. Use a stick to poke through debris.
- Watch for loose plaster and ceilings that could fall.
- Take pictures of the damage--both to the house and its contents for insurance claims.
- Look for fire hazards.
- Broken or leaking gas lines
- Flooded electrical circuits
- Submerged furnaces or electrical appliances
- Flammable or explosive materials coming from upstream
- Throw away food--including canned goods--that has come in contact with floodwaters.
- Pump out flooded basements gradually (about one-third of the water per day) to avoid structural damage.
- Service damaged septic tanks, cesspools, pits, and leaching systems as soon as possible. Damaged sewage systems are health hazards.

INSPECTING UTILITIES IN A DAMAGED HOME

Check for gas leaks--If you smell gas or hear blowing or hissing noise, open a window and quickly leave the building. Turn off the gas at the outside main valve if you can and call the gas company from a neighbor's home. If you turn off the gas for any reason, it must be turned back on by a professional.

Look for electrical system damage--If you see sparks or broken or frayed wires, or if you smell hot insulation, turn off the electricity at the main fuse box or circuit breaker. If you have to step in water to get to the fuse box or circuit breaker, call an electrician for advice.

Check for sewage and water lines damage--If you suspect sewage lines are damaged avoid using the toilets and call a plumber. If water pipes are damaged, contact the water company and avoid the water from the tap. You can obtain safe water by melting ice cubes.